



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

Executive Committee Summary

Country: Lebanon

Planning Year: 2005

UNHCR Regional Office Beirut, Lebanon
Country Operations Plan (1 January – 31 December 2005)

Part I: Executive Committee Summary

(a) Context and Beneficiary Population(s)

• **Political Context**

The recent developments in Iraq have evidently directly affected the asylum situation in Lebanon, as with all other States hosting large numbers of Iraqi refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR's policy toward Iraqi asylum-seekers, who compose the majority of persons of concern in Lebanon, will continue to depend on the developments in the country of origin. The continuing instability in many parts of Iraq, as well as the absence of international staff there since the 19 August 2003 bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad have prevented UNHCR from promoting the return of Iraqi refugees to Iraq over the past year. The presence of a significant number of Iraqis who are of concern to UNHCR in countries neighboring Iraq thus continues, despite some waves of spontaneous and facilitated returns from Iran, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syrian Arab Republic. During the course of 2003, the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut and the Lebanese Authorities organized several return convoys to Iraq, in which UNHCR assisted persons who were previously registered with the Office. In the coming phase, however, and in implementation of the Temporary Protection regime introduced last year, UNHCR in Lebanon will facilitate the repatriation of any Iraqi making an informed and voluntary decision to do so. The Government of Lebanon has expressed some concern regarding the application of the TP regime, and UNHCR demarches continue in an effort to ensure the persons of concern under this regime are protected from detention and deportation. UNHCR has been given access to prisons and detention centers throughout the country in order to assess the voluntariness of any return movements to Iraq, or elsewhere.

Furthermore, UNHCR has also started to receive a new category of Iraqi asylum-seekers fleeing the generalized climate of insecurity and instability, and incidents targeting Iraqis and foreigners either believed to be cooperating with the occupation or the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG), as well as the notable emergence of non-state agents of persecution. UNHCR may well have to simultaneously address two opposing trends: those of return to and exodus from Iraq. The fallout from the war will thus continue to be monitored closely by UNHCR with a view to determining its impact on asylum movements and UNHCR's protection response.

With regard to resettlement departures, the position adopted by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security with regard to additional security checks in the wake of the events of September 11 2001 has resulted in the fact that over 200 recognized refugees have remained pending travel to the US since then. This has had a negative impact on the asylum situation in Lebanon, where many refugees are unable to work or enjoy the full exercise of their rights.

Other regional developments with an impact on the situation of asylum in Lebanon relate to the Sudanese civil war. Despite the wave of violence in Western Sudan and the fleeing of some 200,000 persons across the border into neighboring Chad, recent progress in the peace negotiations between the Government of Sudan and the southern Sudanese opposition movements has led to better prospects for the eventual return of the Sudanese refugees back

to Sudan. Sudanese refugees compose the second largest group of refugees in Lebanon, and UNHCR will also be investing in advance planning for potential repatriation projects over the coming period.

- **Protection Issues**

Lebanon is neither a party to the 1951 Convention nor to the 1967 Protocol, although the authorities have made efforts during the last two decades to accede to most of the major international human rights instruments.

Lebanon has legal provisions in its domestic law to deal with refugee issues, yet they remain unimplemented. Comprised only of a limited number of articles tackling asylum procedures, the Lebanese legislation does not include legal criteria for the definition of a refugee, nor do they have exclusion provisions. Furthermore, they were not put in application since the beginning of the civil war in 1975. In the absence of an effective national asylum procedure, UNHCR has therefore been processing asylum applications and undertaking individual refugee status determination.

Relations between UNHCR and the Government of Lebanon (GOL) were governed for years by unwritten agreements, according to which, the Lebanese authorities tolerated to a certain extent the presence of persons of concern to the High Commissioner. Over the past few years, however, the GOL and UNHCR have been striving to improve relations and to develop a stronger partnership. These efforts culminated in September 2003 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which regularizes the situation of asylum seekers and refugees registered with UNHCR during their temporary stay (6 to 9 months) in Lebanon. The General Security Office (GSO) issues them provisional residence permits in the form of identification cards, pending the finding of durable solutions for their cases. It also provides a temporary residence permit of 3 months to asylum seekers in the country, during which UNHCR should process their application on both first instance and appeal level, provided that they lodge their asylum claims with the office during the two months following their arrival to the country. The mid-term effect of a successful implementation of the MOU will likely be a significant reduction in the cases of detention of refugees and asylum seekers. Refugees and asylum-seekers would thus temporarily be able to enjoy greater degree of freedom of movement and sense of security that will eventually enhance their overall conditions. Ultimately, the MOU has created a wider space for the protection of persons of concern and well serves as the first step in the further development of national asylum structures. RO Beirut will continue its demarches with the Ministry of Justice and the General Prosecutor's office to amend national legislation with the aim of preventing deportation of refugees and others of concern to the High Commissioner. In this regard, a number of meetings were held with several departments in the relevant ministries and government offices.

Following the signing of the MOU, Lebanese judicial authorities recognized the existence of gaps in the domestic law related to foreigners with regard to its ramifications on refugee issues and stressed the need to amend the law in conformity with the provisions of the MOU and other principles of international refugee law. UNHCR has offered the authorities its assistance and technical expertise in this respect. In addition, UNHCR plans to initiate talks with the authorities in order to create, develop and maintain an international protection regime through the establishment of an effective structure to deal with refugee issues.

During the course of the coming year, UNHCR will develop activities aiming to enhance public awareness and knowledge of refugee law and procedures. The activities will mainly target UNHCR's public interlocutors and it will encourage them to better maintain and build up the temporary protection space available in Lebanon. RO Beirut has already started to implement a comprehensive plan in this respect. Two workshops on refugee law - one targeting lawyers and the other judges- were already held in 2003. Others targeting Security Forces, NGOs, journalists and other partners are planned for 2004/2005. Similarly, UNHCR will continue to hold seminars and lectures on asylum and refugee law to university students. UNHCR Beirut will also pursue its PI activities and benefit from the wide range of international and regional media based in Beirut to disseminate news about the work and activities of the organization and reach out to the general public through UNHCR's Goodwill Ambassador.

- **UNHCR's role (Protection, Assistance, monitoring, coordination)**

The MOU provides both asylum seekers and refugees with legal residency status, which is unprecedented in Lebanon. Yet, this positive development notwithstanding, the MOU also burdens the procedures with time restrictions both at the determination and durable solutions level. Additionally, it requires the application to be lodged within a period of two months. RO Beirut will therefore have to complete the applications at both first and appeal instances within a period of three months. As noted above, the office must find durable solutions to recognized refugees within 6-9 months. Whenever requested and justified by UNHCR, this period can be exceptionally extended.

Since refugees and asylum seekers are denied access to work, the limited material assistance delivered by UNHCR through its implementing partner is of vital importance, not only for the refugees' social and economic survival but for their physical and legal protection. UNHCR will still be required to help refugees meet their financial, medical and education needs during their stay in Lebanon. The Office's protection strategy will therefore be designed to achieve the following three goals: to provide effective protection; enhance durable solutions capacity (including exploring possibilities of repatriation); and to sustain assistance to persons of concern, taking into account the guidelines and policy on assisting urban refugees.

With a view to strengthening its role in Lebanon, RO Beirut intends to step up training and outreach activities and to conduct roundtables on protection issues. The Office will organize workshops for various local counterparts (human rights NGOs, journalists, government officials, lawyers, judges and prosecutors, etc.), covering the spectrum of UNHCR's mandate, refugee and asylum law and related activities. The RO will furthermore continue the series of lectures that have been given in various universities and schools over the past years, and in close consultation with Headquarters and other offices in the region, will commence a number of promotional activities - benefiting from the strong and influential presence of local and international media in Lebanon.

Under the MOU, the work of the organization in Lebanon will focus on legalizing the status of the asylum seekers and refugees in the country. In parallel, RO Beirut would have to exert all efforts in cooperation with HQs and foreign embassies in Lebanon to find appropriate durable solutions to the refugees through resettlement or repatriation (when appropriate) within the limited time frames set by the MOU.

Voluntary repatriation is likely to become an increasingly prominent durable solution for certain groups of refugees, namely Iraqis and possibly Sudanese and Somalis. Return to Iraq is obviously still not promoted by UNHCR due to the continuing instability and lack of international UN presence in the country. However, UNHCR, in coordination with the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut, as well as the competent Lebanese authorities, has started to facilitate return for those Iraqis making a free and informed decision to do so. The strategic planning for the return is based on the assumption that returns will take place in a spontaneous manner, that minimum standards are upheld and that return takes place under conditions of safety and dignity.

Repatriation may also materialize as a viable durable solution for Sudanese refugees in Lebanon, provided that the peace negotiations run their course smoothly. The prospect of a comprehensive peace in Sudan could initiate a large scale return movement, which will also be considered as part of the planning process for the coming year.

For the majority of the other groups of refugees, and given that local integration is not a valid option for refugees in Lebanon, resettlement will remain the most viable durable solution. Currently, UNHCR is working predominately with Australia, Canada and the United States to resettle refugees and it is hoped that with the intervention and assistance of Headquarters the spectrum of resettlement countries will expand in the upcoming year, as a significant number of applications submitted to the United States remain pending additional security clearance in place since September 2001. Finland, Norway and Sweden are three European countries who have recently begun sending delegations to Lebanon in order to conduct resettlement selections. It is envisaged that even more European countries will become proactive in resettling refugees from Lebanon. Persons with special needs such as women-at-risk, survivors of torture or persons with pressing security or medical problems, will be submitted, as in the past, through UNHCR headquarters. In addition, the Office is continuously striving to streamline procedures and improve the quality of submissions, so as to increase acceptance rates and minimize delays.

Until such a time as refugees are either resettled or repatriated, they will be able to benefit from the services of the Community Development Center (CDC), set up in order to provide additional training, counseling, and other services, particularly for refugee women and children.

- **Overview of Each Beneficiary Population (Numbers, Origin, Demographic Composition)**

The majority of UNHCR-Lebanon's caseload of 2,522 persons consists of Iraqi and Sudanese refugees. Most of them passed through other countries before seeking asylum in Lebanon. The refugees who currently benefit from UNHCR's assistance are recognized pursuant to the mandate of the organization. In 2003, 711 new asylum seekers approached RO Beirut seeking to be recognized. During the same period, UNHCR recognized 7 persons as refugees.

The largest single group of refugees in Lebanon are the Palestinians numbering an estimated 400,000 persons, who fall under the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's (UNRWA) mandate and therefore not of concern to UNHCR. In addition, an estimated 600,000 Lebanese are internally displaced. The majority of these IDPs were obliged to flee their houses in the South due to the Israeli occupation. So far, the Lebanese government's efforts to mobilize the necessary resources and secure their return to their homes have not yet

yielded results. The GOL's last initiative in this context was the attempt to rally donors at the Paris II Conference in 2002. UNHCR has not been involved in their protection or assistance to date.

- **Capacity and Presence of Implementing Partners**

Although the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) is presently UNHCR's sole implementing partner, the Office also works in consultation with CARITAS, the Amel Association and others. In addition, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) plays a pivotal role with regard to facilitating resettlement of refugees to the United States. Travel arrangements for all departing resettlement cases are made through IOM. MECC's capacity to carry out full case assessments, including home visits and social counselling, is limited by their small number of staff. RO Beirut plans on strengthening MECC's ability to deal with a larger number of cases, especially in light of the expansion of the office's community services activities and the increased focus on refugee women and children's particular needs, in line with the High Commissioner's Five Commitments to Refugee Women.

- **Presence and Role of Other UN Agencies and International Organisations**

While UNHCR has been actively participating in general UN co-ordination activities, more needs to be done to strengthen co-operation with our sister agencies. Much coordination was necessary within the UN system during the course of 2002 and 2003 as UNHCR prepared for a potential outflow of refugees from Iraq. Co-ordination will now focus on the return movement, where collaboration with IOM is envisioned in arranging transportation for the return convoys to Iraq. With regard to the specific situation of the group of Iraqi Kurds previously stranded between the Israeli and Lebanese border, cooperation with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for Southern Lebanon (PRSG) in their relocation was also critical and provided significant support to UNHCR in solving the issue. Cooperation will also obviously continue more generally in relation to public outreach activities and joint awareness raising events.

(b) Selected Program Goals and Objectives

Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme: Refugees of various nationalities	
Main Goals : To provide international protection and assistance to refugees.	
Principal Objectives	Related Output
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer effective protection to refugees and seek durable solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of voluntary repatriation of refugees where possible.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide care and maintenance assistance including education, vocational and skills training. • Meet the special needs of women, children and adolescents. • Assist refugees detained for illegal entry. • Improve coordination between offices in Beirut, Damascus and Amman on irregular movers and other policy issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third country resettlement of some 1000 recognized refugees as appropriate. • Provision of assistance to support needy families, women at risk and female heads of household, handicapped cases and the elderly. • Coverage of 70% of all medical expenses (100% for destitute cases). • Coverage of fees for primary and secondary education of a large majority of refugee children in public schools. • Offer of vocational training opportunities to those who are unable to pursue a formal education/academic studies. • Organization of a summer camp for children between the ages of 7 and 13 years. • "Rattrapage scolaire" for adolescents to allow them follow a regular class. • Institution of a support group for women and organization of skills training for them upon their request. • Provision of a lawyer for refugees detained for illegal entry as well as material assistance to the detainees. • Counseling and follow up for medical cases, social cases and psychological cases etc. • Set up a regional identification system to address issues of irregular movement between Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.
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Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme: Asylum seekers of various nationalities	
Main Goals : To provide protection to asylum seekers in Lebanon through increased capacity to process applications for recognition.	
Principle Objectives	Related Output
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide access to timely status determination for asylum seekers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated access for asylum seekers to RSD procedures through an increased number of legal staff. • Ensured access to RSD for detained asylum seekers.

Name of Beneficiary Population /Theme: Refugees and asylum seekers of various nationalities

Main Goal : To increase the capacity of local authorities to develop registration procedures for refugees and asylum seekers in the country, and to increase awareness among officials and the population at large of the plight of refugees.

Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assist the authorities with regard to refugee registration.• Promote awareness of refugee issues among NGOs, government officials and other actors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct training sessions for local authorities and NGOs and offer legal advice on refugee issues.• Maintain a close dialogue with the Lebanese authorities on UNHCR activities.